

**Speech by Sergey Adamovich Kovalev, on behalf of the Memorial organisation, on presentation of the Sakharov Prize in Strasbourg on 15 December 2009**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Memorial organisation, I would like to thank the European Parliament for its high accolade – the Sakharov Prize.

We at Memorial see this award as relating not only to our organisation. We take the view that, through us, the prize is being bestowed on the whole human rights community in Russia, and indeed more widely – on the entire section of Russian civil society sympathetic towards defenders of human rights. For forty years now – first in the Soviet Union and then in Russia – human rights defenders have been standing up for ‘European’, that is to say, universal values. This struggle has never been easy; in recent years it has become tragic, as it increasingly claims the lives of the best, the most active and the most fearless. I am sure that, in awarding the Sakharov Prize to the Memorial organisation, the European Parliament had them in mind, first and foremost – our dead friends, comrades-in-arms, kindred spirits. This prize belongs by right to them. And the first name I should cite is that of Natalya Estemirova, human rights defender and fellow member of Memorial, murdered this summer in Chechnya. I cannot go on without mentioning other names too: the lawyer Stanislav Markelov and journalists Anna Politkovskaya and Anastasia Baburova, murdered in Moscow, ethnologist Nikolai Girenko shot in St Petersburg, Farid Babayev, murdered in Dagestan, and many others – sadly, it is a list that could go on for a long time. I ask you to honour the memory of these people by standing.

/a minute’s silence/

Thank you.

These people died so that Russia should become a genuinely European country, where public and political life is based on the priority of the life and freedom of each single individual. That means they also died for Europe, since a Europe without Russia is incomplete.

I hope that all those present understand that, in speaking of ‘European values’ and ‘European political culture’, I certainly do not ascribe to such terms any geographical or even civilisational content or any ‘Eurocentrism’. I am convinced that political culture based on freedom and the rights of the individual embodies a universal system of values that is equally fitting for Europe and for Africa, for Russia and for China.

Everything at today’s event is symbolic and interconnected: the award itself, the day on which it is presented, those making the award and those receiving it.

Andrei Sakharov, who died exactly twenty years ago, was not just a distinguished champion of human rights in the Soviet Union. He was also a distinguished thinker, advancing and defending two fundamentally important propositions. The first proposition was that only by overcoming political disunity and enmity does humanity get the chance to survive and develop and the opportunity to cope with the global challenges of the age and secure world peace and progress on our planet. The second proposition was that the only reliable support for our efforts to overcome the political disunity of the modern world is human rights, and, first and foremost, intellectual freedom.

The European Community, whose Parliament instituted this prize while Sakharov was still alive, is, perhaps, today the model closest to that future united humanity dreamt of by Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov.

In recent times Russia and Europe have been increasingly set in opposition to one other. At home in Russia it has become fashionable to talk about ‘Russia’s special path’, about ‘Russia’s special spirituality’ and about ‘special national traditions and national values’. And in the Euro-Atlantic world one often hears opinions of Russia as an ‘odd man out’ among countries,

one whose deformed political development is determined by its history, national psychology and the specific characteristics of its civilisation, and similar speculative constructs. What is there to say in this regard? Of course, Russia, indeed like any other country, has its own path towards ordering life on the basis of universal human foundations. No nation in the world organises its life according to recipes and designs entirely borrowed from outside. But Russia's connection with Europe is far from being determined only by who *borrows* from whom. The question can be put another way: *has Russia brought something* to the pan-European and universal civilisation taking shape before our eyes? And here I would like to recall Russia's unique contribution to the spiritual, social and political progress of Europe and humanity: the key role played by the Russian, or to be more accurate, the Soviet human rights movement in forming modern political culture. Andrei Sakharov rethought the role of human rights and intellectual freedom in the modern world as far back as 1968. His ideas were transferred to the practical level by the human rights organisations created by Soviet dissidents – first and foremost, the Moscow Helsinki Group, represented here today by Lyudmila Alexeyeva. In the mid-1970s these organisations were the first to declare publicly that fine-sounding declarations about international defence of human rights could not just remain declarations. Soviet dissidents succeeded in mobilising world public opinion and, as a result, the Western political elite was forced to move away from its traditional pragmatism and instead to formulate a new vision of the goals and tasks of international politics. Naturally, this development also gave rise to a multitude of new problems that are still not fully resolved – an example being the doctrine of humanitarian intervention and the need to safeguard this doctrine in legal and institutional terms. Nevertheless, over the last thirty years a considerable amount has been achieved, although much more still lies ahead to be done. I simply wanted to recall that Russian human rights defenders of the 1970s were at the origins of this process and, if only for that reason, Russia cannot be struck from the list of European countries. To do this is not in the power of either the present-day Russian political elite or those European politicians who consider Russia an 'odd man out among countries'.

Why, specifically in Russia in the last third of the 20th century, as nowhere else, has the human rights movement become synonymous with citizenship and has Russian human rights thinking been able to develop as far as Sakharov's global generalisations and take on the quality of a new political philosophy? For me, the answer to this question is evident: it is linked to the unique nature of Russia's tragic history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the need to comprehend and overcome the bloody and dirty past. If the Second World War was the impetus for the post-war political modernisation of Western Europe, having become the logical conclusion of the relatively short period of domination by the Nazi regime in Germany, then for the USSR and Russia the need for reconstruction was dictated by the experience of seventy years of domination by the Communist regime, the culmination of which was Stalin's terrorist dictatorship. In the second half of the 1960s two key components of resurgent Russian citizenship were *legal consciousness* and *historical memory*. The human rights movement that arose in the USSR during those years positioned itself, from the outset, first and foremost as a movement for overcoming Stalinism in the public, political and cultural life of the country. In one of this movement's first public texts – a leaflet distributed by the organisers of the historic meeting on 5 December 1965 in defence of the law – it was said in this regard, with the utmost simplicity and brevity: *'In the past the unlawful acts of the authorities cost the life and freedom of millions of Soviet citizens. The bloody past calls us to vigilance in the present'*.

In essence, this special connection between two components of civil consciousness – legal thinking and historical memory – is inherited in its entirety by Russia's modern human rights community, and perhaps also by Russian civil society as a whole.

It seems to me that the paramount importance that Sakharov attached to Memorial in the last years and months of his life is linked to the fact that he understood clearly this specific aspect. In the activity of Memorial, these two basic components of Russian citizenship have merged into one whole.

It is my view that now also, on the twentieth anniversary of Sakharov's death, the Members of the European Parliament, in choosing the recipient of the Prize, also felt and understood this specific aspect. We all remember the Resolution 'On European conscience and totalitarianism' adopted by the European Parliament in April. This Resolution, like the OSCE Resolution that followed in July 'On divided Europe reunited', demonstrates that a united Europe understands the sense and thrust of our work. And I take the opportunity, on behalf of Memorial, to thank you for this understanding. The absurdity of the present-day political situation in Russia is illustrated clearly by the fact that our own Parliament – the Parliament of the country that suffered most and longest of all from Stalinism and Communist dictatorship – instead of warmly supporting these Resolutions, immediately declared them 'anti-Russian'!

All of this shows that, even today, Stalinism is not, for Russia, simply a historical episode of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We let slip a few years of confused and incomplete political freedom. The main feature of Communist totalitarianism – the attitude to people as an expendable resource – was not eliminated.

The aims of State policy are determined, as before, regardless of the opinion and interests of the country's citizens.

The establishment of a regime of 'imitation democracy' in today's Russia is connected precisely with this. All of the institutions of modern democracy are resolutely imitated: a constitutional order, a multi-party system, parliamentary elections, separation of powers, an independent judicial system, independent television broadcasting, and so on. But such imitation, going by the name of socialist democracy, also existed under Stalin.

It is just that today mass terror is not needed for imitation: there are enough stereotypes of public consciousness and behaviour preserved from the Stalinist era.

On the other hand, terror is also used when necessary. Over the last ten years more than three thousand people in the Chechen Republic have 'disappeared' – that is to say, been abducted, tortured, summarily executed and buried no-one knows where. At first these crimes were perpetrated by representatives of the federal authorities, but they then handed this 'work' over to local security structures.

How many Russian security officials are punished for these crimes? A mere handful. Who ensured they were called to account and judged? First and foremost, the human rights defender Natalya Estemirova, the journalist Anna Politkovskaya, the lawyer Stanislav Markelov. Where are they all? Murdered.

We see that the violence routinely taking place in Chechnya is extending beyond its borders and threatening to spread to the whole country.

Yet we see that, even in such circumstances, people are found who are prepared to oppose a return to the past. And this is a basis for hope. Ultimately, we all understand that nobody can return Russia to the path of freedom and democracy but Russia itself, its people, its constitutional institutions, its civil society.

What is more, the situation in our country is not as straightforward as it might appear to the superficial observer. We have many allies in society – both in our struggle for human rights and in our struggle with Stalinism. Moreover, Russian authority is also not as homogeneous as it might seem at first sight.

What can we expect here from European politicians and from European public opinion? Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov formulated these expectations more than twenty years ago: 'Today my country needs support and pressure'.

A united Europe has opportunities for such a firm and, at the same time, friendly policy based on support and pressure but is far from making full use of them. I would like to mention just two examples, familiar to Memorial in its day-to-day activity.

The first is the work of the European Court of Human Rights with respect to complaints by Russian citizens. This institution could become an effective support for the Russian judicial system. It is not just the fact that the very possibility that victims may appeal to Strasbourg must compel Russian courts to work in a more qualitative and independent way. The main thing is that enforcement of the judgments of the European Court should remove the very causes leading to violation of human rights.

In recent years more than a hundred judgments have been delivered in Strasbourg in 'Chechen' cases, concerning serious crimes by representatives of the State against citizens. Yet what happens? Nothing. Russia duly pays the victims the compensation ordered by the European Court, as some sort of 'impunity tax', refusing to investigate the crimes and punish those guilty. Moreover, not only are all the generals mentioned by name in the Strasbourg judgments not brought before the courts but they are put forward for promotion.

So what if the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe is called upon to monitor enforcement of the Court's judgments? In Strasbourg they gesture helplessly – 'What can we do?' – and remain silent.

The second, more general, example concerns relations between Russia and the European Union in the area of human rights. Today they virtually boil down to the fact that the European Union holds consultations with Russia on this subject once every six months. How is this opportunity used? Officials, not of the highest rank, talk for a few hours behind closed doors – Europe asks about Chechnya, Russia answers with a question about Estonia or Latvia, and they go their separate ways for another six months. Both Russian and international non-governmental organisations organise fringe events and hearings and present reports. In meetings with human rights defenders, the representatives of Brussels sigh sadly 'What can we do?' – and remain silent.

So what should Europe do in relation to Russia? From our point of view, the answer is simple: it should act towards Russia just as it does towards any other European country that has taken on certain obligations and has a responsibility to meet them. Alas, today, Europe increasingly rarely formulates its recommendations to Russia in the area of democracy and human rights, sometimes even preferring not to mention them at all. It is not important why this is the case – whether it is a sense of the futility of efforts or pragmatic considerations linked to oil and gas.

It is Europe's duty not to remain silent but, again and again, to repeat and remind, and insist respectfully and firmly that Russia meet its obligations. Of course, not only are there no guarantees, but there are also no particular hopes that these calls will achieve their objectives. However, failure to remind will certainly be understood by the Russian authorities as indulgence. Taking sensitive issues off the agenda unequivocally harms Russia. But it also harms Europe just as much, since it places in doubt the commitment of the European institutions to European values.

The prize you are awarding today is called 'For Freedom of Thought'.

One would think, how can thought not be free, who can limit its freedom and how? There is a means – it is the fear that becomes part of a person's personality and makes that person think and even feel as required. People are not only afraid, they find an outlet in 'loving Big Brother', as described by George Orwell in the novel '1984'. So it was when Russia had Stalin, and so it was when Germany had Hitler. This is now being repeated in Chechnya, under Ramzan Kadyrov. Such fear can spread throughout Russia.

Yet what can stand up to fear? However paradoxical it may be, purely and solely freedom of thought. This quality, possessed by Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov to an unusual degree, made him impervious to fear. And watching him also freed others from fear.

Freedom of thought is the basis of all other freedoms.

That is why it is so appropriate for the Sakharov Prize to be called 'For Freedom of Thought'. We are proud to receive it today.