

DECLARATION OF THE POLISH PEN CLUB

22 February 2021

Freedom of speech and thought – fundamental human and civil rights – are now threatened in Poland by *de facto* political and ideological censorship.

Imposing constraints on this freedom has been taking place for some time now by way of small steps, by training journalists, civil servants, activists or teachers prone to bend under pressure how to eagerly embark on censorship. One spectacular example of this eagerness was the recent cancellation of the photographic exhibition of the world-famous photographer Chris Niedenthal in the gallery of the Complex of Arts Schools in Rzeszów. The exhibition was cancelled for political reasons. We are witnessing the return of censorship which deletes people and names – what it is capable of, can be seen in the destruction of Programme III of public Polish Radio, not to mention a number of earlier cases. We see also the return of censorship standing in defence of the propaganda picture of an ideologically infused reality. Mythomania calls for a monopoly in authoritarian fiction.

During the increasingly numerous proceedings, investigations, civil and criminal lawsuits, the blurred hazy concepts of offending religious feelings and offending the Polish nation are becoming tools of ideological censorship. These concepts and criminal sanctions connected with them should be removed immediately from the legal Codes and from court practice. They are not only unclear, randomly applied and the nature of allegations based on them usually are in the form of smears and defamation, but their presence in the legal Codes assigns prosecutors and judges with the duty of propagandists.

Participation of the Reduta Dobrego Imienia = *Good Name Fort* (which is formally a foundation, while as regards its people and finances – it is an ideological extension of the PiS party and the government) in the court proceedings against professors Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski changes the nature of the civil lawsuit which has been filed allegedly as a private suit against researchers of the history of the Holocaust by the inheritor of one of the negative heroes in their monograph. The board of the said foundation consists of a few persons and include right-wing politicians and writers together with a cabaret artist, till recently director of public television, who became famous when he broadcasted on air “a joke” about genocide in which he stated that extermination camps may be defined as Jewish because it is well known who attended to the crematoria. An institution comprised of such as the above is being used to file a

lawsuit against historians researching the Holocaust. It is not historic truth about the Holocaust which is the purpose of this provocation but nationalistic mythomania. It is about defending fiction and not „the good name” of Poland, since this both dishonours and ridicules Poland.

Administrative actions not only in the realm of science but also of education are of a similar nature. The minister of education decreed an ideological verification of educational curricula and institutions, the very same person who prior to his appointment as minister became famous for speaking out about „some idiotic human rights”. This sentence adds weight to the censorship cleansing process which is being carried out on such a wide scale.

The fiscal attack on that part of the media which are independent from those currently in power and on their financial grounds is also about censorship. Another form of attacking independent media is through their acquisition by state owned commercial companies under the heading of „repolonisation”. This too is nothing but fiction, and also in this case it is only about the monopoly to create an ideological picture of reality, the monopoly for appropriation of reality. The public media which have become monopolized earlier show all too well how the real world can be replaced by an aggressive aberration of propaganda.

Following the nature of the small steps method, the path leads to a multidirectional attack on the freedom of speech and thought. We must not squander this freedom. It is not only a right but it is a trait which defines the human person.