

Aleksei Bobrovnikov TV journalist from the Ukraine



Aleksei Bobrovnikov

Usually, the month of December – after the Board’s decision about granting new fellowships – is a time for unwinding.

This time, however, everything was different. Practically overnight, it was necessary to get the renowned Ukrainian TV journalist **Aleksei Bobrovnikov (37)** out of the country and bring him to Hamburg.

The Donbass region in eastern part of the Ukraine – conflict-prone since 2014 – has since turned into a paradise for smugglers, money launderers and the transnational

organized crime.

In order to prevent the trafficking of weapons, tobacco, fuel, relief goods and gold, Kiev established a special investigative task force. Some of its members as well as various top-level smugglers and their political backers have died since.

The details of these incidents, which Aleksei Bobrovnikov investigated in cooperation with a Russian female colleague, made the headlines. Members of the Ukrainian troops stationed at the border to Donbass are suspected to be entangled in these crimes. Among them is the 92nd brigade, which, since their combat missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and recently in the Donbass, enjoys the fame of national heroes. By his researches, the investigative journalist made some powerful enemies.

Bobrovnikov has repeatedly been threatened, also in front of recording cameras. Even when he went into hiding for several months in the western part of the Ukraine, these threats did not stop. When finally, in late 2016, he learned of a murder plot against him by the Ukrainian military intelligence service, there was only one option left: we had to get out of our holiday mode and take action. Only 36 hours later, Aleksei Bobrovnikov safely reached Hamburg.

The Ukraine konflikt

In 1991, following the dissolution of the USSR, the Ukraine gained its independence. Since then, several attempts at reforming the political and economic system of the second largest European territorial state have been unsuccessful. When president Victor Yanukowych in late 2014 gave in to Russian pressure and refused to sign the Association Treaty with the EU, protests erupted

in Kiev. Only a few months later, Yanukovich was overthrown, the Crimea peninsula annexed by Russia and an armed conflict between government troops and Moscow-backed separatists had broken out in the east Ukrainian Donbass region. So far, all diplomatic attempts to end the crisis, which up to now has claimed around 10,000 lives, have failed.

Editorial

Every single time, it is such a relief when one of our guests has arrived safely.

There is no denying: Gross human rights violations, increasing suppression of personal liberties, the free media and even torture and death threats against courageous representatives of civil society have slowly but surely returned to the European continent. The stories of this year’s guests of the Foundation and the developments in their home countries no longer allow any other conclusion.

Sincerely yours,
Martina Bäurle





What a difference a few weeks in safety can make!

"I had completely forgotten, how important it is to connect with people without having to overcome obstacles or being in danger," Nur Nobi Dulal said on a cool March morning in Hamburg. At the time, he had just returned from Den Haag, where he had met with like-minded Bengali friends and writers.

Only a few weeks before, the 46-year old writer, blogger and filmmaker from Bangladesh had appeared very differently. The man, who arrived at Hamburg airport on the eve of February 1, had been exhausted and visibly drawn after a two-year escape journey. Sri Lanka, Nepal and India had repeatedly threatened him with

deporting him back to his home country – the very place, where for years violent Islamists and his own government had been seeking to persecute him for his commitment to freedom of speech, to women's rights and against religious intolerance and terrorism.

Nur Nobi Dulal's story compares perfectly to those of our former Bengali guests Asif Mohiuddin and Ananya Azad. Like them, the blogger from the port city of Chittagong is listed among 84 names as an "enemy of the Islam," which amounts to a public call for their murder by the Islamist terrorist group Hefazat. His only "crime" being that he campaigned for a liberal and tolerant society. The murders of eight of our Bengali guests' fellow activists within a period of only two years show just how serious these extremists' threats must be taken.

In 2011, Nur Nobi Dulal was voted Bangladesh's "Blogger of the Year". In 2012, he founded an Online Activist Forum, which critically analyzes Bengali society. As a response to the Islamists' "death sentence," he founded the blog Itishon, which by readership very quickly became the second biggest blog in the country – until the authorities deactivated it on September 25, 2016. And even during the months of his escape through South Asia, Dulal kept his liberal and religion-critical online bookshop iKarigor.com alive.

"Now more than ever," Nur Nobi Dulal said after his return from Den Haag: "Now, I am not afraid anymore!"

Thank you very much!

Without the help of the EU-financed platform "protectdefenders.eu", funding of the fellowships of Nur Nobi Dulal and two other guests from Pakistan and Tajikistan would not have been possible this year. A great program of European solidarity.

Sihem Bensedrine

One hundred consultation centers across the entire country. Three hundred interviews every day. More than one fourth of a total of 60,000 requests already been dealt with: The "Truth and Dignity" commission, which was set up by the Tunisian parliament, is supposed to document all human rights violations committed during the dictatorship.



Until the end of their mandate in the summer 2018, the commission's president Sihem Bensedrine intends to record the decades of terror of the old regime, which was overcome in 2011, as thoroughly as possible. "Everywhere in the system," the journalist and former Foundation guest from 2002 says, "representatives of the 'dark state' are still trying to impede the process of coming to terms with the past." But she is far from being discouraged: "In the end, I almost always have it my way."

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