

## **March 20, 2007: Worldwide Reading – in memoriam of Anna Politkovskaya**

### **An appeal for a worldwide reading of Anna Politkovskaya's reports on Chechnya. The journalist and critic of Putin was assassinated on October 7, 2006.**

For a second time the Peter Weiss Foundation for Art and Politics, based in Berlin, makes an appeal for a worldwide reading on March 20. The aim of these interconnected events is to raise awareness of matters and forms of political communication. Because the lie as instrument of political formations also belongs to the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is imperative that the powers that combat it don't weaken.

In her reportages Anna Politkovskaya described the catastrophe of the Chechen war, which was begun for paltry reasons and has since gone on, conducted far from the public eye. Her texts portray scenes of torture, reconstruct cold blooded murder, condemn the cynicism of bureaucrats, depict the misery and desperation of a civilian population that is being torn between the army and rebels, and offer a nightmarish picture of the climate of state-fueled fear and repression in Russia.

The selection of texts "Machkety: A Concentration Camp with a Commercial Streak" and "Special Operation Zyazikov" (from the book "A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya" by Anna Politkovskaya, translated by Alexander Burry and Tatiana Tulchinsky, © 2003 The University of Chicago) should be used for the one-off reading on March 20, 2007. You can find these texts on [www.literaturfestival.com/upload/pdf/Politkovskaya\\_texts\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.literaturfestival.com/upload/pdf/Politkovskaya_texts_Eng.pdf) as a PDF document. For the sole purpose of the worldwide reading, the texts may be used free of charge on March 20, 2007.

This year, on March 20, 2006, the Peter Weiss Foundation initiated its first worldwide reading on the occasion of the third anniversary of the beginning of the war in Iraq. This event was marked as the first "Anniversary of the Political Lie" on which Eliot Weinberger's text "What I Heard about Iraq" was read out at forty-seven venues worldwide, in Australia, the US, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg, Switzerland and India.

We welcome any ideas for "The Second Anniversary of the Political Lie – in memoriam Anna Politkovskaya", to be held on March 20, 2007.  
Please contact: [info@peter-weiss-stiftung.de](mailto:info@peter-weiss-stiftung.de)

Best wishes,

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### **IN MEMORIAM ANNA POLITKOVSKAYA – BACKGROUND**

Anna Politkovskaya, the daughter of Soviet UN diplomats, was born in New York in 1958. She studied Journalism at Moscow University and worked for various newspapers such as "Izvestia" and after the fall of Communism for independent papers, among them "Obchtchaya Gazeta". Most recently she was a special correspondent for the small opposition paper "Novaya Gazeta". Politkovskaya had been working for this newspaper since 1999, when Putin became Prime Minister and the so-called second Chechen war began: two closely-tied events which would trigger a disastrous chain of developments, as Politkovskaya

demonstrated in her articles and books such as "A Small Corner of Hell" and "Putin's Russia".

The North Caucasus mountain region of Chechnya proclaimed its independence from Russia in 1991, and finally obtained it through the peace treaty set up after the first war (during which the media could still report freely). From the Russian side, the independence of the secessionist Kazakhs was perceived as a defeat, if not as a bitter dishonor. In 1999, when a Chechen commando led by the rivals of the then president Maskhadov fell in Dagestan, in Russian territory, the Russian rule of the North Caucasus seemed imperiled. Shortly afterwards two bloody bomb attacks were carried out in Moscow. The Chechens were immediately accused as the perpetrators – a suspicion which to this day has yet to be confirmed. Putin, then the head of the KGB's succeeding organization the FSB, reacted with an "Anti-Terror Operation": the start of the second Chechen war. As response to Russia's humiliation and with the pledge to bring back former greatness, Putin used the war for his own political advancement. In 2000 he was elected as President of the Russian Federation.

Since then organizations such as Reporters Without Borders have observed a growing dissolution of free and independent media in Russia. Economic networks with ties to the Kremlin exercising tremendous influence, bureaucratic obstructions and a general climate of menace have seen to it that Russia numbers 140 (from 167) on the "RWB ranking list of worldwide positions of freedom of the press". Now as before, no freedom of coverage from Chechnya is possible.

Ever since the attacks on New York's World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 Putin has felt part of an international alliance. He associated himself with Bush's propagandized "War on Terror". That same year the war in Chechnya was declared officially over. "Putin's begun to try to prove on the world stage," claimed Anna Politkovskaya in an interview in The Guardian, "that he's just a part of a fashionable war. And he's been successful. When, after Beslan, he began to state that we were seeing virtually the hand of Bin Laden, it was appalling. What's Bin Laden got to do with it?"

With all her reporting Politkovskaya tried to show how the war was far from over, but rather how acts of violence and human rights violations continued unabated. She focused above all on the civil population which was slowly being torn between the two warring parties, and described self-perpetuating cycles of violence. Her depictions shed light on the perverse mechanisms of war, exposing the terms on which they operate, while condemning the beneficiaries.

She ends her final book with a critique directed towards both deceptive political groups and society: "They always say only 'Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda'. A cursed slogan. It is the easiest thing to say, the answer with which to brush aside every new bloody tragedy. It is also the most primitive, with which one can lull the consciousness of a society, one which dreams of being lulled."  
(from "Putin's Russia")

Politkovskaya was awarded many foreign prizes for her work. In 2003 she received the first "Lettre Ulysses Award" for best reportage as well as the Hermann Kesten Medal. In 2004 she was given the Olaf Palme Prize, and one year later the Prize for Freedom and Future of the Press. In Russia she was awarded the Prize of the Journalists Union in 2001. In her native country, however, she also faced threats and intimidation. Yet she refused to have a bodyguard in the same way she refused to go into exile. In 2004 she was the victim of a poisoning attempt. On October 7, 2006 she was shot by an unknown gunman in the stairwell of her Moscow apartment block. The documents used for her last article have gone missing. Anna Politkovskaya left behind two children.