

Press release

Leipzig Media Prize goes to a critical observer of change in Poland

Media Foundation of Sparkasse Leipzig honours Polish investigative journalist Tomasz Piątek with the “Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media 2018”

Leipzig, 27 June, 2018. Polish journalist Tomasz Piątek will be awarded the Leipzig “Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media” 2018. The prize, endowed with 30,000 euros, is awarded by Media Foundation of Sparkasse Leipzig to media professionals who strive for media freedom and independent reporting in a particularly outstanding manner, often putting at risk their own safety and well-being.

“In more than 20 years of journalistic activity, Tomasz Piątek has gained a reputation as a critical observer of societal changes in his home country but he is increasingly under pressure from government institutions,” said Stephan Seeger, Managing Director of Media Foundation and Director Foundations of Sparkasse Leipzig: “Despite the increasingly difficult conditions for journalists in Poland to pursue their work independently, freely and objectively, Tomasz Piątek does not let himself be intimidated by threats in his investigative work.” Piątek’s case, Seeger continues, is an example of how press freedom in apparently democratic countries is increasingly coming under pressure. “The Polish government is creating - as happened in Hungary before - a media law that does not promote critical journalism but restricts it. Recently in Romania, journalists who wanted to report on anti-government demonstrations were arrested. In Slovakia or Malta, investigative journalists have been murdered in recent months. We are observing these developments with great concern,” Seeger explained.

This year’s award ceremony to Piątek should heighten the public’s attention to such developments in member states of the European Union. The “Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media” is endowed with 30,000 euros. The award ceremony will take place on 8 October, 2018 in Leipzig. The date is on the eve of the anniversary of the Leipzig demonstrations 9 October 1989 against the regime of the German Democratic Republic. They were significant not only for Leipzig but also for the whole of Germany, and the whole of Europe,

Laureates 2001 to 2017

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Professor David Protes
Renate Flottau
Thomas Mayer

2002
Grigory Pasko
Jolana Voldánová
Simone Wendler

2003
Daoud Kuttub
Gideon Levy
Wladimir Mostovoj
Netzwerk Recherche

2004
James Nachtwey
La Voz de Galicia
Journalisten helfen
Journalisten

2005
Seymour M. Hersh
Anna Politkovskaya †
Hans-Martin Tillack
Britta Petersen

2006
Fabrizio Gatti
Alina Anghel
Professor Volker Lilienthal

2007
Akbar Ganji
Dr Wolfram Weimer
Vasil Ivanov

2008
Alan Johnston
Susanne Fischer
Win Tin †

2009
Roberto Saviano
Dušan Miliuš
Ahmed Altan

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Sayed Yaqub Ibrahim
Kurt Westergaard
Assen Yordanov

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Oleg Kashin
Fahem Boukaddous
Stefan Buchen

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Ana Lilia Pérez
Balázs Nagy Navarro
Aranka Szávuly
Bettina Rühl

2013
Tongam Rina
Brigitte Alter
Ides Debruyne
Jörg Armbruster
Martin Durm
Glenn Greenwald
The Guardian

2014
Farida Nekzad
Aram Radomski
Siegbert Schefke
Roland Jahn
Christoph Wonneberger

2015
Nedim Şener
Jafar Panahi

2016
Can Dündar
Erdem Gül

2017
Deniz Yücel
Asli Erdoğan

About the laureate:

Tomasz Piątek was born in 1974 in Poland and studied linguistics in Milan. Between 1995 and 2013 he worked as a journalist for the Polish news magazine *Polityka*, the Italian daily *La Stampa* and as an expert in psycholinguistics. Since 2013 Piątek is the columnist of the second largest Polish daily newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Beside his journalistic work, he is also known as an author of several novels, thrillers and fantasy books. With his nonfiction book *Macierewicz i jego tajemnice (Macierewicz and his secrets)* published in 2017, he got targeted by state organs in Poland: as in twelve columns published in the *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Piątek describes the connections of Antoni Macierewicz, Polish Minister of Defence, to the Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Russian intelligence service and criminal groups in Russia. On the one hand, these connections are piquant, since Macierewicz always appears as a determined opponent of Putin in the Polish public. On the other hand, Piątek accuses the minister of being involved in illegal arms and money transactions. Instead of filing a complaint against the journalist or initiating civil-law investigations, the minister intervened with the public prosecutor's office, which assigned the case to its military division. Piątek is accused of "insulting an official during his service and in connection with his work", threatened with a sentence of up to three years of imprisonment. Piątek himself assumes that he is monitored by Polish government at the latest since the publication of his book. For the organization "Reporters Without Borders" Piątek was the "Journalist of the Year 2017".

About the Leipzig Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media:

Every year since 2001, the Sparkasse Leipzig Media Foundation has awarded its "Prize for the Freedom and Future of the Media" to honour journalists, publishers, and institutions that have demonstrated great personal commitment to ensuring the freedom and future of the media. The award is also intended to commemorate the Peaceful Revolution in Leipzig on 9 October 1989, during which protesters demanded "free press for a free country". (<http://www.leipziger-medienstiftung.de>)

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