

Vera Politkovskaya

Russia will have no real justice until the regime is changed

Vera Politkovskaya is the daughter of Anna Politkovskaya, a Novaya Gazeta journalist killed in the hallway of the building where she lived on 7 October, 2006. At the time of going to press (November 2013), the people who hired someone to murder Anna Politkovskaya have still not been named.

Interview conducted in June, 2013

Elena Servettaz: Let us begin with the latest news – the statement from a representative of the investigation committee, Vladimir Markin, who informed us that the investigation had collected all required evidence in the case of Anna Politkovskaya’s murder. Markin stated that the evidence that has already been collected should allow us to build a complete picture of Anna Politkovskaya’s murder. What do you think? Is it right to say that the situation is now clear?

Vera Politkovskaya: No, it is not right, because the person who ordered the murder is still unknown. This means that the murderer has not been found, because this is a hired murder. Soon the suspects are going to be prosecuted, but they are the lowest links in this murder chain, and we still have not come close, and as far as I and all my family members know, the investigation has not yet identified the specific name of the individual who ordered the murder. However, at the end of last year the investigation committee was already claiming that the name of the person who ordered this murder would be announced at some point this year. So far, no name has been announced. So, to answer your question, no, this is not correct, the murder has not been solved.

Elena Servettaz: Presently the investigation committee is telling us that it has a complete picture and we have none, but we know that Novaya Gazeta has conducted its own investigation. To what extent are you satisfied with the

investigation by your mother's colleagues?

Vera Politkovskaya: Here I can only say one thing, that but for the investigation Novaya Gazeta has been doing ever since the murder itself, the investigation committee would not have had many things that it has now. In other words, Novaya Gazeta assisted the investigation greatly with searching for the evidence in this case.

Elena Servettaz: Did the investigation team fail to obtain such evidence because it did not want to, or because it was unable to do so?

Vera Politkovskaya: It's hard to say, you see. They did not want to, but our investigation authorities have a peculiar manner of work, even though they have administrative resources that investigative journalism lacks and which the journalists conducting their investigations lack. We can take the well-known case of Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov's sentence of 11 years in prison. Here's the story: if you followed the trial from the very beginning, then you know that in the first proceedings Dmitry Pavlyuchenko appeared as a witness for the prosecution, and only the evidence collected and presented to the investigation by Novaya Gazeta allowed a charge to be brought against Pavlyuchenkov. Otherwise it's quite likely that nothing would have happened. Maybe, one day they would have got close to him, but it was Novaya Gazeta which helped to collect the evidence of his involvement in that crime.

Elena Servettaz: This is more of a rhetorical question, but how long do you think this situation will continue in this country, how long will we have to wait for justice within our own country in political cases, political murders and all similar cases in general, the Magnitsky case being one of them, rather than wait for journalists or the international community's reaction?

Vera Politkovskaya: Do you mean here real justice to be delivered not by journalists, but by those designated to deliver it?

Elena Servettaz: Yes, like in normal countries...

Vera Politkovskaya: My subjective opinion on this matter is as follows: unless the regime changes, everything will remain the same, it keeps going on and nothing changes. Members of our regime like to talk about our development, about the reforms we have, while in fact everything in this area remains at the same level it was in 2006. I can only compare to the time when I had to face it. Until that time, thank God, life had spared me all that; I did not

have to face the system. And I believe that since 2006, when for the first time I started to sort out what was happening in this area in our country, nothing has changed until today - everything goes on in the same manner. And why would it change when political will in respect of these things won't change. Only political will can change anything, but this government has never had it before, does not have it now, and apparently is not going to have it in future. We only have to wait for this entire government to change.

Elena Servettaz: This is your position, I also sometimes think that we have to wait, while sometimes I will be more likely to join rallies with everyone else, but still for me the Russian government is Putin's government. And when we say: "Putin must go!" how likely are our voices to be heard? Or do we have to use other methods here? Or, do we have to resign ourselves to the situation and wait for 2018 when we can start over? How strong do you think this civil society movement is? What influence can it have?

Vera Politkovskaya: I think, and, again, this is my subjective opinion about the events which began after the parliamentary elections when people went out to the streets - it was Bolotnaya first - this is when I first felt some stirrings of hope that it will happen before his term expires, but today, to be honest, this movement has sort of "dried up". And I do not know what the reason for this was and will not presume to analyse it, as I do not have a profound knowledge of these opposition organisations. Yes, I was at Bolotnaya and at Sakharova and all those squares after the parliamentary elections, but I think that the actions of the people who call themselves the opposition today are apparently insufficient. Demonstrably insufficient, as nothing ever changes. There is the Coordination Council of the opposition, but has anything changed since it began operating? No, nothing has changed...

Elena Servettaz: However, there are changes in the State Duma which are bringing into force new laws all the time...

Vera Politkovskaya: Yes, as well as the amount of criminal charges being brought according to the principle "where there's a person, we'll find a case". And the number of prosecuted crimes punishable by prison terms is still growing. Precisely, this very often concerns various public movements: for example, you may not join an unauthorised rally, otherwise you will be fined "such and such". But what is an "authorised" rally? It's the peoples' constitutional right to gather whenever and wherever they wish, provided that the municipal authorities are informed. Here one thing follows another, and it's

difficult to predict anything. Of course, I would like everything to happen fast, bloodlessly and as soon as possible, but alas...

Elena Servettaz: How do you generally view what we have been saying about the law, because if we listen to Russia's official position, they will tell us that we cannot interfere with the domestic affairs of the country while forgetting that human rights and democracy is not just an individual country's affair according to the OSCE, but an affair of global importance, therefore, when they say "we will handle Magnitsky's death on our own" it sounds ridiculous. As we remember, the case was finally closed. What is your opinion of the American initiative in this case, because, as we know, the restricted list (not the one containing 18 people which was published) includes even the name of Ramzan Kadyrov, who is prohibited from entering the United States and whose assets have been frozen. How efficient is this method, what do you think?

Vera Politkovskaya: I do not find this method very efficient, but it is the only one available, because generally speaking the people who have been "feeding" off the regime, the people who can control whatever they wish in Russia: road stories - police hitting people and children on crossings and not going to prison for that and even remaining in their jobs. All that, one after the other, and basically, this is the only way to fight these people and the defencelessness of the absolute majority of the Russian citizens, because what other way is there..? Here, in Russia, they can do anything they wish. The courts will deliver decisions favourable for them rather than simply, just decisions. Yes, from my point of view today this is the only efficient way of somehow stopping this wave which never leaves Russia. Everything remains at the same level, nothing changes, nothing at all.

Elena Servettaz: The American act named after Sergei Magnitsky concerns not only Sergei's case. And these lists are going to constantly expand and put pressure on Obama's administration, while Obama, as we know, did not want it that much. We remember the statement by Michael McFaul, the current US Ambassador to Russia, who assured everybody that such an Act would never be adopted. He was wrong. If we assume it to be the only tool for us, then why have the European leaders still not taken any harsh steps? If we look at what happened, we'll see that only Angela Merkel dared to say to Vladimir Putin that he was wrong on certain points. We remember that François Hollande bowed and asked for new contracts, but everything is the same everywhere. The minister of foreign affairs of Lithuania, who will now be the President of the Council of the

European Union, said: "We will not adopt the Magnitsky Act but we will not obstruct it either." Why are they taking such "neither here nor there" position, what are they afraid of?

Vera Politkovskaya: Unfortunately, I cannot answer this question, I just do not know, though, I am surprised, too. Politics is dirty no matter where - in Russia, Europe or anywhere else. And I think there are valid political reasons for that and, maybe, economic reasons as well.

Elena Servettaz: Yes, economic reasons, exactly. When Europe freezes in winter, they will think of Russian gas, rather than some law. But, nevertheless, despite the fact that the leaders of European countries say nothing yet, there are senators and deputies in some European parliaments (of which this book is the proof) who put everything else aside and said: "The subject of human rights is more important than the economic comfort for us."

Vera Politkovskaya: I am a person, a citizen of the Russian Federation living here and having absolutely the same problems and risks as any other citizen of this country. Naturally, I want to live where I was born, but I realise that my actual environment is so far from perfect that it is clear that I have to do something. If somewhere some person totally unknown to me somehow acts in support of my interests rather than the interests of the ruling structures, I can only applaud them.